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NASA Occupational Health
Health Alert - April 27, 2009

Within the past week human cases of a potentially new strain of the swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection have been identified in the U.S. and Mexico. As of April 27, there are now confirmed cases in five states (California, Texas, Kansas, Ohio, New York). Internationally, human cases of swine influenza A (H1N1) virus infection have been identified in Mexico and Spain, with testing of ill travelers from Mexico being conducted in New Zealand. The World Health Organization (WHO) is calling this "a public health emergency of international concern." The current phase of the WHO Global Influenza Preparedness is Level 3 Pandemic alert: a new influenza virus subtype is causing disease in humans, but is not yet spreading efficiently and sustainably among humans. The WHO Emergency Committee is reportedly scheduled to meet later today to consider raising the pandemic alert level.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), WHO, state, and local health authorities are working closely together, increasing surveillance and assessing the potential threat to public health. Investigations are ongoing to determine the source of the infection and whether additional people have been infected with similar swine influenza viruses. The CDC has determined that the virus is contagious and is spreading from human to human but how easily the virus spreads between people is not known at this time.

We are in the very early stages of learning about this potential emerging health threat. At this time we know that this illness is the Influenza A virus and can spread from human to human through coughing or sneezing of infected people. It is not known how easily it spreads between people.

Symptoms

The signs and symptoms of the swine flu are similar to the symptoms of regular human flu. The symptoms of swine flu can vary in severity from mild to severe. Symptoms include fever, body aches, sore throats, headaches, chills and coughing. Some people have also reported diarrhea and vomiting. Like human influenza, swine flu can lead to pneumonia and respiratory failure and can worsen underlying chronic medical conditions.

Spread of Infection

The main way influenza viruses are thought to spread is from person to person in respiratory droplets of coughs and sneezes. This can happen when droplets from a cough or sneeze of an infected person are propelled through the air and deposited on the mouth or nose of people nearby. Influenza viruses may also be spread when a person touches respiratory droplets on another person or an object and then

touches their own mouth or nose (or someone else¹s mouth or nose) before washing their hands.

The swine flu can spread in two ways:

- Through contact with infected pigs or environments contaminated with swine flu viruses.
- Through contact with a person with swine flu.

People ill with swine influenza virus infection should be considered potentially contagious as long as they are symptomatic and up to 7 days following the onset of illness.

Seek Medical Treatment

If you become ill with influenza-like symptoms, you may want to contact your health care provider. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed. The swine flu can be treated with antiviral medications. IF YOU ARE SICK, YOU SHOULD STAY HOME AND AVOID CONTACT WITH OTHER PEOPLE AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE TO KEEP FROM SPREADING YOUR ILLNESS TO OTHERS.

Emergency warning signs that require urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen.
- Sudden dizziness.
- Confusion.
- Severe or persistent vomiting.

Self Care

- Check with your health care provider about any special care you might need if you are pregnant or have a health condition such as diabetes, heart disease, asthma, or emphysema.
- Check with your health care provider about whether you should take antiviral medications.
- If influenza is confirmed by your health care provider, or if you develop signs and symptoms consistent with influenza that resolve without medical care, stay home for 7 days after the start of illness and fever are gone.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink clear fluids (such as water, broth, sports drinks) to keep from being dehydrated.
- Be watchful for emergency warning signs (see above) that might indicate you need to seek medical attention immediately.

Prevention

There are many things you can do to prevent getting and spreading influenza:

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hands cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread that way.
- Avoid close contact with sick people.
- If you get sick, CDC recommends that you stay home from work or school and limit contact with others to keep from infecting them.

For Updates and the Most Current Information Visit the Following Sites:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu>

World Health Organization; <http://www.who.int/en>

NASA Occupational Health Web site: <http://www.ohp.nasa.gov>

NASA Occupational Medicine Pandemic Plan:
<http://www.ohp.nasa.gov/policies/index.html>

Department of State International Travel Information Web site:
http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis_pa_tw_1168.html